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Teach with Heart, Not With a Textbook

The day that I decided to teach, my mother will say was in second grade, when Brendan Hamilton told me if it wasn't for him, he never would have learned his fractions. If you ask me, it was the day that I walked into Evan Cyzowski's class, and we weren't allowed to walk on his imported rug from Poland, and he made us turn the lights off because it hurt his eyes.

Throughout that class with him, he showed us all that we were individuals and that we could become something that people do not expect. He would lecture here and there, but it was mostly focused on the growth of our opinions. In an English classroom, that is so beneficial for the students. He got us; he wanted to learn about us, and that is something that made him such a superior teacher. I can totally see myself throwing out these crazy ideas from the novels that my students will be reading and seeing where they go with it. That's what I hope to do, and I know that I will find a way to do so.

I want to be in a high school classroom, with any level really because I feel that those four years are the best years to really help show someone who they can and will be. I will follow my mentors, Brian Stack and Evan Cyzowski's and their philosophy of teaching; where teachers are the tour guides into the adventure park that is the mind. Teaching this age range of students is just where I feel most comfortable. It is where I find I will be able to use my own life experiences to help them gain and learn something from their own.

I honestly have never looked into this position as something that I will gain anything for myself. There is a saying in the south that my family uses a lot of the time, "Do what makes your

heart feel the warmest” and that is what teaching does for me. Being able to see the light bulb turn on for a student sends goose bumps up and down my spine. This isn’t something for me to gain; it is something that I will be doing so that all the students who walk through my door will gain something for themselves.

I will do everything in my power for those kids. So many people say that I will be worn out after a few years, but I also know my limits. I feel like I could be the one that students go to, but they will come to me, knowing that I might have to redirect them, I might have to be busy sometimes, I might be with another student with a more pressing issue. These are all of the things that continuously run through my head, but I know that I will contribute a safe place for all of these kids to go to.

Because of attending a more urban school, we had a huge amount of diversity between the students. The socioeconomic levels were very split, with mostly middle class, but they were not the only ones. The amount of students that came from a lower income family probably outweighed the others, but it wasn’t always as noticeable.

I took a lot of classes that were all connected to humanities. We were a very out of the box kind of school and humanities had a large focus base throughout the curriculum. We got to build our own programs and where we wanted to be which helped a lot of us become as successful as we have. I knew what I wanted to do so I ran with it. That was the best way really. All of my classes were structured in a way without tests, the amount of feedback we would receive was huge, and it just was a good fit. I know for a fact that having come from a very open school, I will be more open to different things. Yes, I do learn in a specific way, but I also have been taught in so many other ways that I have experienced a lot of different approaches.

After reading and researching a lot about all different kinds of educational philosophies, I have found that my philosophy fits into many different categories. One of my all time favorite authors and activists, W.E.B. DuBois and his philosophy on higher education is one that I always turn to. He believed that "education was the principal means to empowerment; family, community, and schools had to work together". Through this, DuBois promoted integrated schools, but not necessarily mixed schools. His focus was just allowing everyone to receive the same kind of education no matter who they were. It was important for these students to be able to focus on their education in a way that did not really affect their lives in a negative way. School is not a place for students to feel scared, or worried about their safety. Education is used to improve life and the brain, while also showing students real life examples of what they can encounter in their lives. It is very important for students to get the kind of nurturing environment in their schools that they should also be receiving outside of the schools.

Though I have a very broad view on what my educational philosophy is and how fluid it is as experiences come in, I stand pretty firm on some educational issues. When it comes to English Language Learning, I feel like all teachers should be certified and able to teach these students without singling them out in the classroom. I believe that students who learn differently and not in the traditional manner should be given the opportunity to experience different kinds of schooling such as alternative outreaching programs offered through the school. I believe that when it comes to multicultural areas; everyone should be treated and taught exactly the same. There should be nothing in this world that stands between a child, and even non-traditional students from getting the same kind of educational opportunities. This definitely includes the students who come from low socio-economic status families. There are some things that parents need to surrender to allow their families to survive and it shouldn't be allowing their children to

have the best kind of education possible for them. I also feel that having such a firm stance on these issues, there isn't much to defend. These are issues that have been brought to the attention of the educational system for a very long time, and it is one that no one should really even think about disputing. If you are meant to be a true teacher, these issues are something that you face, and struggle with every day.

My own philosophy follows closely to pragmatism. Pragmatism stresses evolving and changing rather than just "being". The universe is dynamic and ever changing as a state of becoming. Thinking to pragmatics is unverifiable. There is an emphasis on the importance of really understanding what it means to know and how to get to the knowledge of knowing. To know, the learner must have a conversation or interaction with the environment. Learning happens best through different experiences. Those experiences will change both the learner and the world that surrounds them. They use ideas as instruments for problem solving. Social growth and personal growth is the only underlying principle.

Teaching with this philosophy is really just allowing students to question what we know and how to reconstruct what we know to match the changing world. There are no absolutes in knowledge and the world, and students have to learn how to question and what is solve those problems that might come up. There is an emphasis on the truth and that it is found in the real world, which is always changing. The best way to teach with this philosophy is to use cultural diversity that enriches the society just as physical diversity enriches the universe. The process of solving the problem is more important than the specific subject matter. Teachers must use collaboration as a learning community to allow for investigations, and technology with other resource as key elements.

The philosophers that work mainly with this philosophy are Charles Price, John Dewey and most recently Richard Rorty. Price believed that habit of action undertaken to overcome indecisiveness. The purpose of thought is to produce action and the meaning of thought is a collection of results of actions. Dewey believed in using evolution to explain that human beings are creatures who adapt to one another. Life is a series of overlapping and interpenetrating experiences and situations. The primary unit of life is experience. Rorty said that realist is not fixed. It is the task of thinkers to come up with a procedure correctly describing the nature of reality. He didn't focus much on education, but by using this philosophy, the teacher can no longer represent expert knowledge as accurate. Students should be finding their own knowledge through a set of their own ideas and procedures. Expertise is a matter of "usefulness" rather than truth.

I believe that students should use their own experiences and interactions with the world to cultivate their own thinking. By using their own experiences, the student is able to realize that they have experiences that can change their own thinking of the world as they progress through their lives. It is more about realizing that in this moment in time, what they think and assume is not the end, or the only thing they will ever think. It is about finding that they can become something different later in their lives.

In teaching with this philosophy, I would be using the kinds of cultural-diversities that are surrounding my students in a specific area. Everyone comes from different backgrounds and different experiences, and it is in the sharing of those experiences that we can all learn from each other. I would be allowing my students to find their own way of solving problems, through discussion, and interpretation of environments.

I like this kind of philosophy because it has an emphasis on making mistakes, and learning from those mistakes. It focuses on paying attention to the mistakes made around them, and realizing that there is something different. The two theories I follow pretty closely are constructivism and progressivism. These theories fit somewhat well into my overarching philosophy out of the four basic philosophies given.

Constructivism emphasizes hands-on, activity-based teaching and learning during which students develop their own frames of thought. By teaching this way, it allows freedoms from the teacher to include a variety of different learning activities during which students are free to infer and discover their own answers to important questions. True learning is to be an active framing of personal meaning by the learner and less of the framing of the teachers thoughts. There should be a development of critical thinking and the understanding of big ideas rather than the mastery of factual information. Contemporary problems are reached by allowing the students to be active in the learning process. There is a focus on the students' interests and the current social problems of the world that is surrounding them. The students will learn their content and skills within the problem context. The teachers' job is to spend careful time selecting the problems to tackle based on the student maturity level along with what the curriculum needs. The classroom should be a place where they can easily share their ideas, where they can have diverse learning activities as well as the materials being available. Discussing different issues and different points of the issue is encouraged in this type of environment. All of the students' voices should be honored but should allow room for questions and the possible debate. Through this though, there should be a level of respect from each other that can be a little higher than other places, for the opinions are very open and available. If the respect is not given, there will be a disciplinary action through dialogue and debate with the individual, not as a whole.

Progressivism is a theory that emphasizes all ideas being tested by experimentation and that learning is rooted in questions developed by the students. It favors human experience as a basis for knowledge rather than authority. It leaves the learning open to the beliefs of the individuals, and stresses different programs on student involvement allowing the student to learn from the experience. It emphasizes how to think, and less of what to think. The idea is to move beyond conventional ideas to come up with novel interpretations or solutions. There is a focus on interdisciplinary problems that could encompass a variety of academic disciplines and skills rather than content-based approach. The school must take on the task of improving society. Student to teacher planning is the key to democracy in the classroom allowing for a process to give students some freedoms as well as teachers in the decisions of what needs to be or what should be studied. Progressivists regard books as a great tool to be used rather than sources of indisputable knowledge. The idea of listening to others and their ideas is highly valued in the classroom so that students can understand that you don't always have to be right or have a hard set opinion, you are allowed to build on the opinion. Change is constant so learning must always include open-mindedness to change. It is stressed that the students must recognize that everything we do or think can affect others.

I find that my education philosophy is one that will end up being a very large focus in my classroom that will affect in numerous ways. As for my classroom organization, I believe in a very fluid classroom. I do not believe in having a desk for myself in the classroom. I feel like by having a desk, it separates me not only physically but also mentally from my students and I believe that my students should see that I believe that we are on the same level when it comes to the actual classroom. Learning will be a focus for not only my students but for myself and I believe that by eliminating my desk, it shows the students that I want to learn from them as much

as they are learning from me. I also believe very much that the desks for my students should be set up in a half circle that way everyone is seen equally. There will be a big focus on discussion throughout all of units and I think that by having the classroom set up in a U, it will level the playing field for all of my students to discuss openly with each other and myself. Depending on the content of the discussion, I will either sit directly in the middle able to spin and make eye contact with all of the students, or be sitting in a student desk at the head of the U allowing for everyone to see me as well as me seeing them.

When it comes to motivation, I believe in pushing my students to the idea of intrinsic motivation. This will happen through a focus on not only the mind but also the heart in the classroom. Through literature, there are many different opportunities for the addition of personal opinion and I believe that this is a great way for my students to be able to expand on what their hearts mean and say when it comes to their own views on the literature. A lot of what happens when analyzing literature is from the students' personal experience and the maturing of their own morals as they go throughout school. This is something that I feel is extremely important and should be a huge focus on what my students are paying attention to in the classroom and through what I hope to instill in them.

Like I have mentioned before, I believe that the content area of English leaves a lot open as to what my students can connect to their own lives. As W.E.B. DuBois has mentioned throughout his own philosophy that students should be able to focus on themselves no matter whom they are or what they have encountered throughout their lives. This is something that I feel can be expressed really well throughout literature and personal writing. Finding a voice for students is very important and I believe that I should be able to stand back and allow my students

to expand on their own beliefs through focusing on their hearts and what their heart is saying when it comes to how they interpret the literature and their writing.

Assessment is honestly still a difficult area for me when it comes to my philosophy. I don't really believe in testing my students on novels because just memorization and repetition is something that isn't as important to literature as it would be to express their beliefs and thoughts on what they are learning. I do believe that written work, and written "assessments" is something that I will really focus on in the classroom. I also believe that there will end up being a focus on assessing my students on their discussion and the progress that they make throughout the course of the year when it comes to developing their thoughts verbally. I think this is an important asset for life.

My classroom climate will be a very open place for my students to be able to express themselves in a casual but respectful way. This is very important to me that my students can see my classroom as a "safe place." With this needs to come with an understanding that I will be there to listen to them, and give them advice for certain things but I will not be there friends as that is not personal. I need my students to be able to trust me and what I am trying to teach them will come forth somewhere else in their lives, but I will have to report something that could be harmful to themselves or others. I also don't believe in leaving the classroom for lunch or breaks. I think that it is really beneficial to have an open door policy in my classroom, allowing students to come when they have breaks, or even just to do their homework. I will also be one of those teachers who stay for a while after school and I am more than willing to run certain study sessions, and even open discussion sessions to allow the students to expand on their ideas in a different forum than the classroom. I will make my classroom a place that students will want to come to.

As stated in other areas of my philosophy, the learning focus in my classroom will be less on content and more on how the content can connect to their own lives outside of the classroom and later in life. This is really important to me because literature is not just something to read, it is intended to be connectable to different places throughout their lifetime. I know for me personally, some of the things I have learned from my English classrooms have come up in other places in my life and I will forever hold those close to my heart. I will be stressing some quotes from books, and trying to get my students to memorize these quotes so that they can use them later in life. One of my favorite examples is "The Great Gatsby" for it has a lot of areas in which the literature is focused on finding yourself through the mistakes of others, finishing with how no matter how bad things can get, there is always the possibility of being able to move on from the bad and find the good.

Technology will be important in my classroom for I believe in having a website that holds all of the information that is stated throughout classroom time and also uses as a resource for outside understanding. I also think that students learn best while they have a place to write and record their learning and understanding in the classroom. I will most likely have an online journaling assignment throughout the year so that my students can journal about their experiences and their likes and dislikes of the lesson. I think that by documenting their experiences they will be able to come back to it later in life. I also think it is important for students to be able to put their understanding into a comprehensible project of some sort and I think this will work best through technology focused presentations that may or may not be presented to the whole class, or just myself.

I believe that teachers should be present, not only in the classroom but outside of the classroom. A lot of students will notice if their teachers are at their sporting events. I believe in

being there for my students. As exhausting as it can be, I will do my best to be at their outside presentations, sporting events, award banquets, showing that I am proud of not only what they do in my classroom but outside of my classroom as well. This is something that I always noticed when my teachers would be at my concerts, dance recitals, soccer games, showing their support for me and I hope to be that for my students as well. I want to be the person that can be there and show my students that they can have someone to look up to. I do plan on sharing with them my own accomplishments such as progress in graduate school and possibly even my own dissertation showing them time management skills; if I can do it while also focusing on them and their lives, then they can do it later on as well.

I believe that through my entire philosophy, I can contribute to a school district the idea of student led instruction. I believe that especially in a high school setting, students should be able to experience and interact with big ideas and issues in a “real world” kind of way. These students should be shown what it is like to be a functioning member of society and I believe that by running my classroom with such an open discussion base, and having my room be somewhere where we can tackle big ideas and maybe even some controversial ideas, this is a way that my students will be able to get that kind of connection with the real world. What some teachers tend to forget is that most students are experiencing these kinds of issues in their day-to-day lives as it is, and we should be utilizing their experiences to allow all of the students to gain that culture. I stress one last time that teaching is not something that I see myself striving for personal gain. I see myself doing everything in my power to allow my students to thrive whether it is with their education or with their daily lives. My hope is that my students can connect well enough with me that they come back and follow up with me, because I know that I will be more invested in their lives and their goals than with my own.